John 6: 16-21

 Good morning, everyone! Let us pray. Today, our passage is from John 6: 16-21. Read. In William Shakespeare’s play, “Hamlet: Prince of Denmark”, the protagonist, Hamlet, is trying to convince his friend, Horatio, that he saw his father’s ghost. Horatio, who is a rational minded person, does not believe him. Hamlet then delivers one of his most well known lines in theater history. “There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than you could ever dream of in your philosophy.”

When we hear the story about Jesus walking on the water, we know it is telling us about the importance of faith. But, there is another aspect to that story and that is the focus on one of the enemies of faith, which is fear. While prepping for this message, I read the same story in two other Gospels, which are Mark and Matthew. In Mark 6:50-53, Jesus says “Courage!” to his disciples first when he greets them. In Matthew 14:22-33, there are more details provided about this story. When Peter sees Jesus walking on the water, he attempts to do the exact same thing to meet him, but he nearly ends up drowning when he sees the severity of the storm around him.

 And this leads into one of the greatest sources of fear, our view of the so-called “real world.” As most you remember from my testimony a few years ago. I suffered a mental breakdown from a disorder known as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or OCD in 2012 to 2013. OCD is an anxiety disorder where people perform certain rituals due to anxiety over a certain issue. For example, a person afraid of getting sick or germaphobe, would spend up to four hours in the shower trying to get clean. This was a very dark time for me and many of the fears I experienced pertained to the “real world.” Mainly, I was afraid of not making it in the “real world.” My future was very unclear and this frightened me very much.

However, by God’s Grace, I was healed! One day, I was grocery shopping with my parents. I had just visited my psychiatrist for the first time and he not only diagnosed my condition officially, but he recommended a combination of medication and behavioral therapy. I was hesitant at first, because I didn’t know what that therapy would entail. While I was walking down the sidewalk with my parents, I suddenly experienced a window of 15-20 minutes of liberation from my anxieties I had been feeling. It was as if God was answering my prayers by telling me to not be afraid to go to therapy. The following week, I was very enthusiastic about doing therapy and a year and a half later, I went from an anxiety scale of 39/40 to a 14/40. I was diagnosed as being cured! Ironically enough, I was healed at Mt. Sinai by a therapist whose last name was Moses.

While I feel this story is applicable to the theme of our Summer Bible Conference this year of “Do You Want to Get Well?”, I also realized the second half of my recovery story applies even more. This is the part I would like to call “Aftermath.” And no, I’m not referring to the music label founded by Dr. Dre. The best way to describe this “aftermath” is by something another patient with OCD had told me in 2013. I attended the OCD Conference that year in Atlanta, Georgia, where I met another young man with OCD named Kevin Putman. I interviewed him for my film about OCD and he was kind enough to share his story. He mentioned that when he finally conquered his OCD, he felt like he had just climbed a mountain. Cue Rocky Picture. He said that he wanted everyone to know how monumental this moment was, but soon realized that no one really cared. A few years later, I would experience what he meant.

I would soon get a job in shipping and I felt like I could conquer anything, but soon, I realized that no one really cared about what I had gone through and the “real world” began to take hold. It seemed like the “real world” was content in holding me down and saying, “God doesn’t care about you!” I began to harbor feelings of intense rage and fear and wondered if God was truly exploiting me. I would do my best to battle these feelings and even confided in my boss about my OCD condition against my parents’ wishes as they believed people wouldn’t be interested in helping me. However, one day, I was facing a very angry client and lost my cool. Instead of helping me like he promised, he condemned me and I got into an argument with him and was fired. Later, I would do a better job of controlling my anxiety, but I still had many fears. How would I live on my own? How would I accomplish my dreams of reaching out to audiences with very little money? Will I even find a wife in the near future? The “real world” was lurking around the corner.

In today’s story, we see that when Peter tried to mimic Jesus’ miracle of walking on the water, he nearly drowned, due to his fear of the surrounding storm. I see the storm as a possible metaphor for the “real world.” When Jesus performs a miracle, He pierces the veil of our reality. In other words, he defies the logic of the “real world.” We also see that power at work in both stories where Jesus healed two blind men. In the first story, Jesus healed a blind man who couldn’t make it into the fountain to be healed. The man must have been on the verge of giving up hope, but Jesus came and once again pierced the veil of reality by healing him. However, as soon as the man was healed, he was interrogated by the Pharisees and gave them Jesus’ name out of fear. In contrast, the second man who was healed, testified truthfully to the Pharisees about Jesus’ healing, even at the cost of casting him out of the synagogue. Jesus would return to that man and lift his spiritual blindness by revealing Himself as the Messiah. Once again, Jesus managed to defy the “real world” and pierce the veil of reality.

The “real world” can be a very frightening place. Bills, taxes, low pay, stress, food shortages, rising prices including rent, and let’s not forget war. The world is a very corrupt place that is run by only a few people. You either learn to conform or feel the world’s consequences. There are so many fears out there. However, Jesus not only defies the expectations of the world through His miraculous powers, but also shows us his absolute control over it. When God moves in a supernatural way, the “real world” comes in immediately to say, “You didn’t see that!” This is part of what Paul talks about when he says in Ephesians 6:12, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

From this, we can take hope! It seems there are three solutions to fighting the power of fear that the “real world” seems to hold over us. The first solution is to know who Jesus is. We can see this when the Disciples accepted Jesus into their boat after He said, “Don’t be afraid, It is I.” They at first thought Jesus was a frightening ghost, but Jesus’ greeting was meant to calm their fears by showing them He meant them no harm. This is true especially when they saw Jesus rescue Peter from drowning, and their faith in Jesus allowed them to welcome Him into their boat and probably more into their hearts. At the height of my OCD, I kept praying to Jesus to heal me, to the point I would cry myself to sleep. Even though I felt like abandoning hope completely, I knew Jesus’ compassionate heart. I knew He would help me if I truly sought Him out. Today, I can testify to His loving Kindness, amen!

Second, we have to know ourselves. We have to be willing to not only accept our fears, but to also face them. Throughout the Gospels, the Disciples’ faith were constantly challenged by their fear of the “real world”, especially the fear of persecution. Peter even denied Jesus three times out of that fear. My faith, though still very small, also helped me to face my fears, especially when I was fired from my shipping job in 2015. One of my OCD fears was actually being fired from a job and never being able to work again. When this happened, I surprisingly was not as afraid as I was a few years ago, because I knew if God could see me through my mental breakdown, then He would also see me through my current situation. This allowed me to realize how powerless many of my fears were and I was able to move on to a better job a year later at NYRA.

Third, we have to know where we stand in our relationship with God. The disciples knew Jesus as the Messiah and that as his disciples, he would not only protect them, but teach them so that He could eventually send them out into the world to testify to His message. Even when Peter was walking on water with Jesus, he couldn’t focus on the wonderful miracle out of his fear of the storm or the “real world.” Peter nearly drowned, but Jesus was there to save him with His outstretched hand. Jesus had faith in what God had planned for Peter, but Peter couldn’t focus on God’s plans due to his fear. While working at NYRA, I had to live upstate on my own for the summer. I was at first petrified, as I had never done anything like this before. Needless to say, it was a very challenging time. I nearly fainted one day from heatstroke, I was constantly yelled at by my director as I didn’t understand the format of the show, and I still had to provide for my own personal needs. But, I kept praying to God every day and eventually realized that God not only saw me through so much already, but that He was not willing to give up on me as well. I was then filled with determination to overcome my “real world” problems and was able to successfully power through not only that summer, but my entire career at NYRA and straight through BMCC also.

In conclusion, fear is one of the most potent weapons used against not only Christians, but everyone in general. The “real world” is one of the best perpetrators of fear. However, praise God for constantly piercing the veil of our reality and showing us His Gracious Love! The “real world” is in opposition to God’s movements in our world, but this is why Paul tells us in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Recently, I received a promotion at work, allowing my annual pay to increase from $31,000.00 to $47,000.00. Praise God for His Beautiful Mercy! Even when I felt like giving up, I still had a tiny piece of faith, knowing God can pierce the veil of reality to perform something wonderful. I have learned how to contend with my fears of the “real world”, even if it’s only little by little, by trying to have more faith in God.

One word: Jesus pierces the veil of our reality.